

*Citation for published version:*

Manning, P 2015, 'Reconciliation and perpetrator memories in Cambodia', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 386-406. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijv015>

*DOI:*

[10.1093/ijtj/ijv015](https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijv015)

*Publication date:*

2015

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijv015)

This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced version of an article accepted for publication in The International Journal of Transitional Justice following peer review. The version of record Peter Manning, Reconciliation and Perpetrator Memories in Cambodia, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Volume 9, Issue 3, November 2015, Pages 386–406 is available online at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijv015>

**University of Bath**

## **Alternative formats**

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:  
[openaccess@bath.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@bath.ac.uk)

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

## Reconciliation and perpetrator memories in Cambodia

*This article considers the reproduction of perpetrator memories to reflect on processes of reconciliation in Cambodia. The article explores the circulation of memories around local memorial and heritage sites within a former Khmer Rouge (KR) community, Anlong Veng. Anlong Veng was home to several senior KR leaders, two of whom were found guilty of crimes against humanity at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). The article draws on ethnographic and interview data to illustrate examples of the traction, limits and dissonances that flow from the ECCC and its attendant discourses of 'national reconciliation', as they intersect with local accounts of the past. I argue that while perpetrator and 'counter' memories can have the potential to disrupt reconciliation, the case reveals complexities in the reproduction of memories of atrocity among both victim and perpetrator groups that appear simultaneously 'unreconciled' and commensurable to the ECCC project. In doing so, the article opens a critical space for reflections on the place of perpetrator memories in reconciliation initiatives and human rights scholarship.*

**KEYWORDS:** Cambodia; Reconciliation; KR; Perpetrators; ECCC

This article explores the implications that perpetrator memories and memories about perpetrators have for reconciliation in Cambodia. While efforts to do justice to the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge (KR) years (1975-1979) are ongoing, anchored around prosecutions of the surviving KR leadership at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), questions of reconciliation in Cambodia also remain persistent and outstanding. The ECCC is a principally retributive mechanism but it is heavily implicated in Cambodia's politics of 'national reconciliation' because of the way it focuses on the KR leadership, eliding the culpability of lower level perpetrators. Reconciliatory endeavours in Cambodia more broadly have situated rank and file KR perpetrators as key parties to reconciliation, and scholarship and advocacy on Cambodia often locate lower level KR as victims of the regime. Moreover, wider NGO sponsored reconciliatory initiatives in Cambodia are often also attached to the work of the ECCC, and therefore pivot on the denunciation of the KR leadership as a starting point and premise. On this basis, questions of memory are pushed front and centre. Trials are crucial sites for writing public histories and framing social memory, symbolically demarcating troubled pasts from renewed presents. Moreover, they often invoke a collective 'national' memory as the key site of redress and restoration.<sup>1</sup> The role of the ECCC as an agent of reconciliation implicates conflicting 'unreconciled' perpetrator memories because competing versions of the past can challenge and disrupt the production of stable, common narratives about the meaning and lessons of the KR years.

---

<sup>1</sup> Moon, Claire. "States of acknowledgement: the politics of memory, apology, and therapy." In *Crime, Social Control and Human Rights: From Moral Panics to States of Denial, Essays in Honour of Stanley Cohen* (2007: 314. Devon, UK: Willan Publishing.)

This article draws on ethnographic and in-depth interviews to reflect on the circulation of memory around heritage and memorial sites in Anlong Veng, a small town in northern Cambodia. Anlong Veng is an important research site because it is governed and populated by former KR cadre and was home to several senior KR leaders, two of whom were found guilty of crimes against humanity at the ECCC and still face trial for charges of genocide. As such, ECCC sponsored outreach initiatives treat Anlong Veng as an important locale for reconciliation initiatives and the provision of genocide education. On this basis, Anlong Veng is both an exceptional and unique research context. It offers neither a generalizable account of perpetrator memories among the KR, nor a complete picture of the complex challenges for reconciliation in Cambodia today. The case is, however, instructive for our understanding of dynamics of reconciliation in Cambodia, and the way that key parties to reconciliation are able to talk and think about their memories of the KR, and the attendant implications for ‘national reconciliation’.

The first section of the article examines the relationships between reconciliation and memory. I suggest that while memory and reconciliation are contingent, socially and politically mediated frameworks for understanding and acting on the past, memory is integral to reconciliatory politics and has the power to disrupt initiatives intended to reconcile parties. The second section outlines the politics of “national reconciliation” in Cambodia today. I show that the ECCC (re)animates and anchors a politics of reconciliation that pivots on the denunciation of the KR leadership, while enacting a de facto amnesty for lower level perpetrators of atrocity. Following a brief discussion of methods, the article proceeds to consider examples of conflicting memory that appear simultaneously ‘unreconciled’ and yet commensurable to the ECCC project. Three themes gleaned from fieldwork in Anlong Veng are explored, showing how the traction, limits and discordances of reconciliatory politics are visible in the case at hand. Perpetrator memories and memories of perpetrators are uneven, contested and changing. I identify a tendency towards the hagiography of a (now deceased) KR leader, Chit Chuon, alias Ta Mok, noting the way that similar generous remembrances are not observed for other KR leaders, like Pol Pot. Ta Mok was the KR military chief from 1977 and responsible for some of the worst atrocities perpetrated under the KR, earning him the moniker of ‘the butcher’. These examples, superficially, seem in conflict with how reconciliation might pivot on the denunciation of the KR leadership (and therefore the ECCC). I suggest that the existence of memories that celebrate KR figures like Ta Mok, however, emerges from a sense of nostalgia, obligation, and the currency of nationalist tropes of patriotism, vulnerability and solidarity that reframe memory in the present. Moreover, against this, material and economic development appears to undermine the persistence and salience of memories of perpetrators. I argue that these memories register on frameworks that are dislocated from the way the ECCC lays claim over the past because claims over memory that are principally juridical, symbolic and national operate on a different level to vernacular and contextually embedded memories, converging and diverging in complex ways. On this basis, the circulation of perpetrator memories raises questions for reconciliatory practices within Cambodia - and transitional justice more broadly - concerning the extent to which reconciliation must transform or accommodate conflicting memories of past violence.

“National reconciliation” and the ECCC

The question of reconciliation in Cambodia remains fraught because we see multiple and often conflicted claims over what reconciliation might mean and entail. Given Cambodia’s long history of conflict and mass atrocity, there are important questions to ask concerning exactly which parties should be reconciled, and the events around which reconciliation must pivot. The range of actors implicated in Cambodia’s bloody history means we must be cautious about the contingency of any claims for reconciliation and that appeals for reconciliation invariably obfuscate or exclude some memories of political violence, as they call for reconciliation around others. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide an exhaustive account of all reconciliatory initiatives in Cambodia, and the forms of reconciliation that they envisage. These range widely and include genocide education initiatives intended to prevent the future recurrence of atrocity,<sup>2</sup> or efforts to raise awareness about trauma and mental health that emphasise personal healing and reconciliation.<sup>3</sup> It is notable that NGOs have led a broad range of reconciliatory enterprises in Cambodia across a range of contexts, and play a central role in conducting ECCC outreach work, screening verdicts, and soliciting complaints and applications for recognition as victims by the ECCC as ‘civil parties’.<sup>4</sup> The focus of this article, however, is those state sanctioned claims for national reconciliation anchored at the ECCC that are most seriously implicated by the circulation of perpetrator memories in the case of Anlong Veng.

The state sponsored claim to ‘national reconciliation’ in Cambodia is rooted in a specific political history. The language and narrative of national reconciliation emerged in 1979, when Vietnamese troops and Cambodian rebel factions captured Phnom Penh and removed the KR from power. Tasked with massive social reconstruction, and facing the beginning of what would be a further twenty years of civil war, the newly established People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK 1979-1989) sought to entice defections from those KR insurgents deemed not bear ‘blood debts’, while at the same time denouncing Pol Pot and other KR leaders for perverting an otherwise happy revolution.<sup>5</sup> The twin planks of this account of the KR years – defined by the guilt of senior leaders and exculpation of the rank and file – materialised at a 1979 ‘People’s Tribunal’, which was established in Phnom Penh to try the KR leadership in absentia, and in subsequent amnesty programmes offered throughout the 1980s and 1990s that continued to offer protections for lower level KR from prosecution. Here we see key memory techniques – punishment and amnesty – working hand in hand to demarcate and smooth the transition from an old era from a new one.

---

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the report from the erection of a genocide memorial in Phnom Malai [http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Genocide/pdf/Genocide\\_Education\\_in\\_Cambodia\\_May\\_10\\_2013.pdf](http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Genocide/pdf/Genocide_Education_in_Cambodia_May_10_2013.pdf) Last accessed 31st May 2015

<sup>3</sup> Information about TPO programmes is available at <http://tpocambodia.org/index.php?id=justiceandreliefforsurvivors>. Last accessed 27<sup>th</sup> May 2015

<sup>4</sup> Sperfeldt, Christophe. "Cambodian civil society and the KR tribunal." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* (2012): ijr037.

<sup>5</sup> Gottesman, Evan. *Cambodia after the KR: Inside the politics of nation building*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

An important historical parallel exists here with the ongoing prosecutions at the ECCC because the ECCC focuses principally on the role of KR leaders, while exculpating lower level perpetrators. The ECCC were established in 2006 following agreement between the UN and Royal Government of Cambodia to prosecute “senior leaders” and “those most responsible” for crimes committed between 1975 and 1979 during the “Democratic Kampuchea” period. Between these years, an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians died of starvation, disease, or were executed.<sup>6</sup> The ECCC is a mixed ‘hybrid’ institution that incorporates both Cambodian and international judicial and administrative personnel (though judgments rely on a ‘super-majority’ weighting toward the balance of Cambodian judges). The ECCC has worked on four cases to date, two of which have gone to trial; it remains uncertain whether investigations into a third and fourth case, 003 and 004, will proceed further.<sup>7</sup> In 2012 the former head of the ‘S-21’ security centre in Phnom Penh, ‘Duch’, was sentenced to life imprisonment having been found guilty of crimes against humanity in Case 001. Case 002 focuses on the role of surviving “senior leaders” of the KR. In 2013, in order to expedite proceedings, following the death of one key defendant, Ieng Sary, and the severance of another, Ieng Thirith, due to ill health, Case 002 was broken into more manageable ‘mini’ trials. In August 2014, two surviving senior KR leaders, Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan, were found guilty for crimes against humanity for their role in the evacuation of Phnom Penh in 1975 and sentenced to life imprisonment in the first part of Case 002/01. Case 002/02 is currently ongoing and deals with the difficult question of whether genocide was perpetrated by the KR.

Prosecutions beyond Cases 001 and 002 have met fierce resistance from the Cambodian government, principally on the basis of the apparent threat posed to processes of reconciliation. Investigations into Cases 003 and 004 have continuously faced public opposition from leading Cambodian government officials, including the Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has suggested that further trials could lead to a resumption of war.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, the delimitation of the ECCC mandate to focus only on the KR leadership, alongside domestic pressure to contain the breadth of prosecutions, shows how the ECCC is implicated in a wider history of (state sponsored) claims for national reconciliation. In this light, the ECCC closely mirrors the appeals for reconciliation that underpinned the 1979 People’s Tribunal: a personalised story of the guilt of the few rather than the many emerged, eliding the possible culpability of mid and lower KR members. The ECCC states that lower level KR have nothing to fear, and ECCC partner groups have been quick to locate lower level KR as victims of the regime, enacting a de facto amnesty for lower level KR.

On the one hand, human rights groups have been critical of claims for national reconciliation because they are thought to operate as a tool for the Cambodian People’s Party (the continuation party of the former PRK government) to protect senior members from scrutiny of their roles during the KR years. Human rights

---

<sup>6</sup> The ECCC also has a novel reparative function in that it offers officially recognised victim associations ‘symbolic’ and ‘moral’ compensation.

<sup>7</sup> **Arrest warrants were recently issued for suspects in Cases 003 and 004 though, as of May 2015, these have not been executed.**

<sup>8</sup> See, for example <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/hun-sen-warns-of-civil-war-if-eccc-goes-beyond-limit-78757/>. Last accessed 24<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

organisations do not see prosecutions in Cases 003 and 004 as a problem for reconciliation, viewing the completion of cases beyond 002 as the barometer of the independence of the ECCC, and therefore its legacy as an effective judicial mechanism.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the Cambodian government maintains that further prosecutions will undermine processes of reconciliation, and that its conditions for the establishment of the ECCC – that only a handful of figures would be indicted – were clear from the start.<sup>10</sup> As much as these tensions reflect a struggle for control over the ECCC process today, they also reflect a struggle for control over national memory. Human rights groups contend that more punishment – a wider range of punitive denunciations – will lead to more justice and less impunity. For the Cambodian government, this was always a story about the wrongdoing of the (handful of figures still alive in the) KR leadership, and in redressing those memories, its own role as ‘saviours’ of the nation could be affirmed, contingently on the containment of memory.

As we can see above, there are ongoing contests over what memories are publicly sanctioned and foregrounded as part of the national biography. Frictions between different readings of blame implicate reconciliation to the extent that competing narratives about the past might be potentially divisive, or even harmful, for social relationships (and, according to the Cambodian government, wider political stability). Importantly, the ECCC is thought to act as an agent of reconciliation in two ways. On the one hand, the limitation of prosecutions, and the exculpation of lower level KR, promotes reconciliation by *containing* memory. This further serves to exclude and displace questions of responsibility from wider experiences of political violence that occurred in Cambodia outside of the KR years. On the other, proponents of the ECCC further see punishments and denunciations of the KR leadership as reconciliatory because they promote the truth and deterring the future recurrence of crimes. The twin processes of *concealment* and *disclosure* of the past work in tandem, thus working to stabilise memory in the name of reconciliation.

### Reconciliation and Memory

The growth and entrenchment of transitional justice means that reconciliation is now an assumed strategy for the governance of societies that have experienced conflict and atrocity. Yet while scholars working in transitional justice have devoted great energy to pinning down a clear sense of what reconciliation might involve, definitions of reconciliation that hold water over time and across different cases remain elusive. My approach in this article is not critical of the ‘ideal’ of reconciliation, loosely understood here as a process and set of outcomes that involve meaningful changes of relationships that go beyond peaceful co-existence between previously conflicting parties.<sup>11</sup> However, in recognising the ongoing struggles to define terms, we

---

<sup>9</sup> Open Society Justice Initiative, ‘The Future of Cases 003/004 at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia’ (2012). [http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/eccc-report-cases3and4-100112\\_0.pdf](http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/eccc-report-cases3and4-100112_0.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> For example, at the ‘Dealing with a Past Holocaust and National Reconciliation: Learning from Experiences’ conference (2006), Sean Visoth (a government appointment ECCC administrator) specifically tempered appraisals of the need for the ECCC against imperatives of peace and reconciliation.

<sup>11</sup> Clark, Phil. *The Gacaca courts, post-genocide justice and reconciliation in Rwanda: justice without lawyers*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

are sensitised to the contingency of the claims that have been advanced in the name of reconciling peoples. Reconciliatory initiatives have taken on highly varied forms at different historical moments, and appeals for reconciliation are further caught up in the classical dilemma of human rights and transitional justice thinking: the need to transform society on the basis of a shared set of collective values, which denouncing past wrongs) and the liberal ideal of the production of a reconciled and democratic public space, within which competing visions of society can coexist harmoniously.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, while reconciliation carries a variety of meanings in the extant scholarship, it is important to acknowledge that reconciliation might mean different things even within the same contexts and milieus. In recognising that reconciliation – as a set of assumptions, ideas and claims made by scholars, practitioners and constituents – is negotiated and contested in uneven ways, we might analyse, as Moon invites, appeals for reconciliation as they are propagated on a case by case basis.<sup>13</sup> These cautionary reflections that emphasise the contingent and political construction of reconciliation as sets of claims rather than objective outcomes, direct the focus of this article toward specific state sanctioned claims for reconciliation as they emanate from the ECCC, and the importance of analysing their reception and negotiation among the ‘perpetrator’ constituents to which they are addressed.

The relationship between reconciliation and memory is complex. Memories are socially mediated and should not be treated as stable archives that are the exclusive property of individual psyches. Memories are both deeply personal and yet constantly reconstructed through social frameworks that offer them context and wider meaning. Memories involve accounts and stories about the past and are therefore the key site for the moral adjudication of experiences of conflict and atrocity, and the social relationships that emerge on that basis. We must therefore pay attention to the practices, forces and contexts that make memories of atrocities either persistent or changing, and the agents that are implicated in attempts to transform or stabilise them.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, the relationship between memory and reconciliation is ambivalent because reconciliation is deployed to mean different things at different times, asking memory to deliver different social outcomes in different cases e.g. ‘peace’, ‘healing’, ‘truth’, or otherwise. Crucially, we must also recognise how memories can be disruptive of reconciliation initiatives. In any given context, memories can challenge claims for reconciliation by contesting the substance of *what* is said about the past - what events and parties must be reconciled. They can also contest the ‘appropriate’ moral responses to those pasts and the denunciation or affirmation of memories of violence and suffering, whether these are realised through techniques such as punishment, apology, reparation or otherwise.

The role of memory in reconciliation therefore hinges on the specific architecture of any claim for reconciliation. In many cases, reconciliation is envisaged as a linear process, whereby specific memories (and truths) are acknowledged and communities are thought to enjoy expiation as a consequence. A unifying characteristic of claims for reconciliation, more broadly, is that they are structured around the establishment

---

<sup>12</sup> Arenhövel, Mark. ‘Democratization and transitional justice’ *Democratisation* 15: 3 (2008): 570-587.

<sup>13</sup> Moon, Claire. *Narrating political reconciliation: South Africa's truth and reconciliation commission*. (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2008.)

<sup>14</sup> Olick, Jeffrey K. *The politics of regret: On collective memory and historical responsibility*. (Routledge, 2013).

of a stable and consensual memory of past violence. Indeed, appeals for reconciliation often graft memories into highly specific sequences, ordering memories around a ‘prelapsarian’ untroubled past, episodes of rupture and conflict, through to the restoration of states of harmony that are permitted by acts of memory, forgiveness and truth telling.<sup>15</sup> The enabling of reconciliation through processes of disclosure stands in contrast with the assumption that, sometimes, social solidarity and reconciliation are only achievable through the concealment and containment of memories that are deemed too disruptive for fragile societies. Indeed, as Renan famously remarked,<sup>16</sup> the forgetting and erasure of conflicts is often integral to affirming nations and national solidarities. On these terms, claims for reconciliation often emerge coextensively with amnesty agreements. In some appeals for reconciliation, memory is invoked as a specific object of intervention: individual subjects should recognise and disclose their own traumas and be reconciled to their pasts. In others, claims for reconciliation specifically subsume individual memories within collective narratives, blurring the already porous boundaries between memories of personal experiences and collective histories. The core premise at work here is that specific techniques for the management of memory are deployed – disclosure and punishment, or containment and exculpation – for reconciliation to be effected in the present. In the Cambodian context, ‘national reconciliation’ is based on the assumption that the ECCC can produce common narratives about the KR years, based on the denouncement of the KR leadership, and that stable relationships with memories of the past are possible thereupon. These frameworks of memory and reconciliation set important limits that the actual circulation of perpetrator memories might conflict with, and the terms on which might they do.

### Anlong Veng

Anlong Veng sits on Cambodia’s northern border with Thailand in a remote and once densely forested landscape. Following the four years of KR rule and the Vietnamese capture of the Cambodian interior in 1979, KR troops and swathes of displaced refugees were pushed into and across the border regions with Thailand. The area became a key site of conflict between KR guerrillas and Vietnamese and government troops from this point. Located directly across the border from refugee centres used by the KR to launch attacks against the PRK, the region was part of the Cambodian state’s attempt to fortify and seal the Thai border, known as the ‘K5 plan’. As a consequence, the area is still badly contaminated by landmines and other unexploded ordnance.

From 1990 the town changed hands repeatedly between government and KR, though following successive amnesty programs deployed by the Cambodian government in the mid-1990s Anlong Veng was left as the final stronghold of control for the remaining KR leadership. In mid-1997, Pol Pot ordered the execution of

---

<sup>15</sup> Moon, Claire. ‘Prelapsarian state: forgiveness and reconciliation in transitional justice’ *International journal for the semiotics of law* 17, no. 2 (2004): 185-197.

<sup>16</sup> Renan, Ernest “What is a nation?” in Bhabha, Homi K., ed. *Nation and narration* (Routledge, 2013).



Son Sen<sup>17</sup> and his family, accusing him of attempting to bargain an amnesty deal with the government side. The purge of Son Sen and family forced the other remaining KR factions to act and in June 1997 Pol Pot was arrested by KR forces near the Thai border in Anlong Veng under the direction of Ta Mok. Pol Pot was subsequently placed on trial, denounced by the remaining KR factions and held under house arrest. In April 1998 Pol Pot died and his body was cremated on a bed of rubber tires. The site of Pol Pot's cremation is now marked by the Cambodian Ministry of Tourism (MoT) as a historical site.

This specific, local history has consequences for the memories that are reproduced in the Anlong Veng area, and therefore reconciliation more broadly, celebrating some 'heroes' of the KR but not others. For example, recent oral history research conducted by DC-Cam<sup>18</sup> in the Anlong Veng area suggests that while there is a general sense of 'guilt' among former KR, they also celebrate efforts by Ta Mok to build more permanent infrastructure in the area such as schools, a hospital, roads and a dam for fishing and irrigation<sup>19</sup>. The valorisation of Ta Mok – rather than other senior KR leaders such as Pol Pot, Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan (the latter both currently held at the ECCC), for example – is articulated through memories that reference fixed points of community support, development and resources such as the building of schools, hospitals, and local infrastructure. When Anlong Veng finally fell to government forces, 'Ta Mok High School' was renamed 'Anlong Veng School', though is still often referred to as the former.<sup>20</sup> This article echoes some of these findings, while rethinking the implications they have for claims for 'national reconciliation'.

A number of significant recent research contributions on issues of memory among former KR cadre in the Anlong Veng area are worth outlining at this point. Noren-Nilsson's work on questions of nation identity among children of former KR – based partly on interviews in Anlong Veng – argues that the intergenerational transmission of memories of genocide and war is "cloaked in silence".<sup>21</sup> Noren Nilsson suggests that such silence enables children to integrate into the national community by embargoing aspects of the past that might conflict with the state sanctioned public history of the KR. At the same time, a 'revolutionary' heritage that promotes ascetic values of hard work and community solidarity is still celebrated within former KR communities. This is notable in the sense that revolutionary ethical imperatives are reproduced nostalgically in the context of rapid consumer-driven economic development in ways that place competing demands on young people in the area. Noren Nilsson argues that 'revolutionary' and 'national' identities and memories remain in conflict, raising important questions for processes of reconciliation in former KR communities.

---

<sup>17</sup> Son Sen was a key figure in the KR security apparatus and a member of the KR 'Central Committee' leadership body.

<sup>18</sup> DC-Cam has conducted oral history work in the Anlong Veng area, though in June 2012 DC-Cam also erected 'anti-genocide' plaques at the local high school as part of a nationwide strategy to educate young Cambodians about the DK period..

<sup>19</sup> Eng, Kok Tay. Searching for Truth. Documentation Centre of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. 2012

<sup>20</sup> Wood, Timothy Dylan. "Tracing the Last Breath." (Doctoral Thesis, Rice University. 2009), Pg. 184. Notably, although Wood's fieldwork took place in 2002, several informants in 2009 repeated this specific reference.

<sup>21</sup> Norén-Nilsson, Astrid. "Children of Former KR Cadres." Peace Review 23: 4 (2011): 464.

The role of Anlong Veng's 'revolutionary' heritage has been examined by Timothy Wood in research into state sponsored conservation efforts in Anlong Veng.<sup>22</sup> In 2002 the local authorities (that include numerous former KR) were instructed by the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) to preserve and conserve a series of 'historical' locations in the area as part of a tourism and development strategy (coinciding, notably, with the national 'Visit Cambodia 2003' tourism campaign). The preservation and conservation of these locations involved the erection of markers and boards to designate 'historical importance' but, Wood emphasises, very little else. Wood suggests that the effect of minimal conservation efforts (e.g. the absence of supporting textual information and the poor training of tour guides) serves to silence localised, celebratory accounts of KR leaders that may conflict with the 'official' state sanctioned narrative that lays blame for the atrocities perpetrated under DK neatly at their feet. The existence of such accounts again has important implications for the reconciliation and the ECCC because they disrupt prevailing narratives of 'what happened'. The questions for reconciliation arise because memories that valorise KR leaders may exist in opposition to the way the Cambodian state and the ECCC has narrated blame for atrocities and war at their hands. At the same time, as this article explores, we find puzzling examples of perpetrator memories that seem acquiescent to the principle of the ECCC prosecutions even when they appear 'unreconciled'.

#### Notes on fieldwork and data

The period of fieldwork informing this research took place in Anlong Veng in April and May 2009 as part of a wider nine month multi-sited ethnography examining the politics of memory and reconciliation in Cambodia in the context of the ECCC. The rationale for research in Anlong Veng was to explore the way that former perpetrators were (re)negotiating relationships to memories of the KR in the context of the ECCC. The article draws on participant observation data gathered in the context of heritage sites in the Anlong Veng area, fourteen depth interviews with local residents, principally former KR, as well as informal, field-noted conversations with community members. Three non-KR members of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces stationed near Anlong Veng were also interviewed as they visited heritage sites in the area.<sup>23</sup>

The case of Anlong Veng opens up possibilities for understanding the relationship between memory and reconciliation because it is governed and populated by former KR cadre and was home to several senior KR leaders. On the one hand, this means that Anlong Veng represents a unique research context, raising important questions for the broader conclusions that can be garnered from this research. Firstly, the Anlong Veng community is composed largely of former KR and their families, who themselves moved to the area from other parts of Cambodia during the civil war; non-KR residents tend to have moved to the area from 2001 onward. This necessarily means that this article does not address more intimate (and often challenging)

---

<sup>22</sup> Wood, 23

<sup>23</sup> All informants have been anonymised except where the offer of confidentiality was waived. Fieldwork adhered to ethical guidelines as laid out by the XXX Research Ethics Policy and Procedures, available at XXX

questions of interpersonal reconciliation that remain outstanding in other areas of Cambodia. Important analysis by Laura McGrew attends to these forms of reconciliation in greater depth, for example, arguing that what we see in Cambodia are often relationships of coexistence rather than ‘deeper’ forms of reconciliation.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, it is crucial to bear in mind that memories of the KR and their leadership are contested among former cadre, both within Anlong Veng and also across former KR zones. The celebration of specific KR leaders is very different in other Cambodian provinces that were dominated by or sympathetic to the KR, often dependent on the factional patronage networks that were historically in place (and often still persist today).<sup>25</sup> This means that we must be wary of developing generalised readings of the memories of the KR in Cambodia. While recognising these important limits, the uniqueness of the case also foregrounds its importance as a window for understanding perpetrator memories and their implications for reconciliation. Historically and more recently, the Cambodian government and now ECCC have positioned lower level perpetrators as key parties to reconciliation. The community has been targeted by ECCC outreach groups like DC-Cam as an important locale for reconciliation initiatives and the provision of genocide education. On this basis, the conversations and encounters presented here are important less for developing a general account of perpetrator memories in Cambodia, but because of the specific ways they illustrate how it is possible to think and speak about the politics of memory and reconciliation in Cambodia.

### Ambivalent encounters

In my early visits to the Anlong Veng I was eager to develop a more general sense of the different perspectives on the relationship of former KR cadre to their pasts. At one of the MoT conservation sites, I asked one former fighter if people still think about the KR and the war:

People in Anlong Veng don’t all think the same way. A lot of people think that Ta Mok was a good man, but mostly people talk about the past less. Over the past thirty years it is like two different lives, from the worst to the best. People talk about that time [the war/KR] less and less. The younger generation will forget about the KR. Because now is better, with the roads and all that. This place will be like Poipet<sup>26</sup>, another prosperous border crossing, of course people will forget the harder times.

I: Why do you think prosperity means forgetting?

People don’t want to remember those times when things become peaceful. Now with the court [the ECCC], people don’t want to talk about that time. People here, they don’t want to get called as a witness.<sup>27</sup>

On the one hand, the former fighter’s comment illuminates the belief held among (some) former KR fighters that ‘history’ (as retold by the state) has unfairly demonised senior KR figures like Ta Mok. In the first

---

<sup>24</sup> McGrew, Laura. "Reconciliation in Cambodia: Victims and Perpetrators Living Together, Apart." (PhD diss., Coventry University, UK. 2011)

<sup>25</sup> See XXX (anon author)

<sup>26</sup> Poipet is another border town into Thailand in Western Cambodia.

<sup>27</sup> Personal interview, Anlong Veng, Cambodia, April 2009

instance, we could see how this poses challenges in terms of reconciling such perspectives to the cause of the ECCC, and the direct reference to residents' reluctance to testify points to fears and suspicion about the work of the court and a betrayal of loyalties. My informants, more broadly, sought assurances that my research was unconnected to the ECCC, revealing anxieties about both what could and should be disclosed about the past. At the same time, these anxieties conflict with a general sense that forgetting was an inevitable process of economic change and the conviction that the younger generation will forget the KR illustrates the challenges for reconciliatory initiatives that attempt to transform memories of the KR by educating younger sections of society about the need to remember. On the other hand, the comment shows how complicated the relationship between memory and reconciliation can be. In downplaying the significance of memories of the conflict in the wake of peace, the informant points to the way in which communities are active in negotiating and demarcating their own senses of 'old' and 'new' eras (without necessarily needing a formal mechanism to do so). The description of 'two lives' – then and now – points to Stan Cohen's suggestion that flux, change and rapid development can effect 'discontinuities' of memory, or 'slippage'.<sup>28</sup> For Cohen, this is one feature of the key paradox of denial: knowing and not knowing the past all at once. At the same time, the link between prosperity and forgetting seems to imply the possibility that problematic or challenging memories are less likely to be maintained under conditions of material improvement, i.e. that economic development seems to act as a mitigating influence on the memory of painful pasts. In this sense, it is perhaps less a question of 'knowing' and yet 'not knowing' and more a process of negotiating which aspects of the past are congruent with ongoing material priorities. This is important because it shows that Cambodians have actively renegotiated the significance of memories of political violence against present economic priorities; such economic priorities are dislocated from reconciliatory processes that are principally legal and juridical.

At Pol Pot's cremation site, efforts had been made to protect both the remains and the presentation of the grave. A number of small offerings and incense sticks were present at the foot of the memorial structure, though the corrugated iron roofing and small wooden perimeter fencing did not convey great 'reverence'. The MoT sign simply read 'Pol Pot was cremated' here and no further information is supplied concerning the circumstance or background to his death. The minimalist preservation and memorialisation of the resting place of 'Brother Number One' reflected conflicted memories of the different KR leaders among lower level cadre, implicating important perspectives about responsibility. As one remarked:

Pol Pot was at the top. The top was responsible. He was responsible for everything. This is why everyone labels him a bad man, because he was responsible for the destruction of Cambodia.

I: So people here remember him that way?

---

<sup>28</sup> Cohen, Stanley. *States of denial: Knowing about atrocities and suffering*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 243

Even the smaller generals did terrible things. But it's not clear, we have different ideas. Yes, Ta Mok is a hero for the people here, but we cannot say this in public. We cannot say [here] but we can say with our friends, with our families.<sup>29</sup>

On the one hand, the former fighter recognises the 'destruction' of Cambodia, locating responsibility at the hands of Pol Pot. This is important evidence of the traction of the reconciliatory narrative of blame propagated by the Cambodian state since the fall of the KR: that the revolution was hijacked by a genocidal KR leadership, and the subsequent PRK government were true heirs to the revolution. At the same time, we again can see the existence of memories that conflict with the state-sanctioned account of the KR because Ta Mok – a specifically local hero – is celebrated and the fighter further complicates his reading of responsibility by noting the role of 'smaller generals' (a hugely sensitive topic given the role of formerly mid-ranking KR officials within Anlong Veng's local government, and the possible prosecutions under Cases 003 and 004 at the ECCC). Perhaps most tellingly, the view that Ta Mok could not be celebrated in public points to a rupture and disjunction between 'community' level and 'private' remembrances of the life of the former KR leader, supporting Noren-Nilsson's claim that discussion of the KR past is 'off limits'.<sup>30</sup> I asked about this issue further:

I: Why can't you say that in public?

In this area, most of the hierarchy people [authorities] are from the KR. But a lot of the local authorities are from the government too. So the smaller KR people, some of them are worried about saying the wrong thing... People talk with their friends about that time. That time was troubled. Yes, Pol Pot brought destruction, but now everyone just sees his faults. It is disappointing, he was a strong man.

It is revealing that, following the former fighter's suggestion that there are limits to what can and cannot be said in public and private about the KR as a topic, the fighter returns to discuss Pol Pot, suggesting that people only see his faults. On the one hand, we can see how the fighter may be acceding to what he considers publicly acceptable comments on the KR leadership. On the other, we can read his latter comments as evidence of conflicted memories of the KR leaders. The former KR of Anlong would rarely deny or downplay the magnitude of the suffering of the KR years. At the same time, they often talked about their former leaders melancholically, on nostalgic terms, as painful but comforting memories.<sup>31</sup> Informally, interviewees and other former KR seemed conflicted about the ECCC, offering a tentative acceptance of the need for prosecutions, while insisting that their former leaders were not 'bad men'. These recollections were often intertwined with personal attempts to vindicate their own involvement in the movement, as patriots fighting for their country. To the extent that such memories seek to elevate or celebrate the lives of KR

---

<sup>29</sup> Personal interview, Anlong Veng, Cambodia, May 2009

<sup>30</sup> Noren-Nilsson, 19 at 464

<sup>31</sup> Memory studies scholars researching nostalgia point out that nostalgia is not innocent and is often exclusionary, but tends to reflect discomfort and the yearning for stability in the face of change and flux. See Atia, Nadia, and Jeremy Davies. "Nostalgia and the shapes of history Editorial." *Memory Studies* 3, no. 3 (2010): 181-186.

leaders, they conflict with state-sponsored varieties of reconciliation because they seem to disrupt the denunciation of KR leadership, and the needs and expectations of wider victim constituencies notwithstanding. Yet the same former KR also tended to accept the need for prosecutions and recognised the wrongs of the past.

In Anlong Veng town, the most prominent heritage site pertaining to the conflict is Ta Mok's 'Historic House'. The house itself looks out over one of Ta Mok's local infrastructure projects, a dam across a river and a large lake on the flooded land created as a result. I asked one (former KR) local resident about the site:

Some domestic tourists come here, but just as a vacation, for relaxation. People come here because they want to know the history. They want to know the life of Ta Mok, the way he lived. He was a hero in this region because he protected the country, he moved his troops here, fighting the Vietnamese.

I: Do mostly Khmer people come here?

Mostly Cambodians. Some from Anlong Veng, but also many from outside. More so at weekends. The place is good for a picnic. A few foreigners come also to learn the history also.<sup>32</sup>

On the one hand, this is a recreational space. On the other, the root of the authority of the site as a historic house, is an 'attraction' and 'fascination' with Ta Mok as a 'hero' or national 'protector'. This complicates the role of Ta Mok's historic house because it transcends purportedly 'un-reconciled' parties: the attraction of a patriotic protector comes about specifically from understandings of the nation and nationalism that resonate with both former KR audiences and visitors from outside Anlong Veng. The role of this space as a 'national' attraction, affirming solidarity for both KR and non-KR audiences, elides its role as a historical marker of the life of a man implicated in atrocity and past national conflict.

The majority of visitors were Cambodians from outside the local area. The local resident's references to 'inside' and 'outside' people (meaning former KR residents and or those visiting/settling since the end of the war) are important: "Now the outside people come more and more, they visit and we are fine with them. We were not responsible for the conflict, it was the leaders." Again, this comment reflects to the complex relationship of memory and claims for reconciliation. The resident suggests that there are no divisions between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' specifically because only senior KR leaders were responsible for the conflict. This is evidence of the traction of a reconciliatory politics that blames the few while absolving the many, as manifest at the ECCC. At the same, the resident is hagiographic in his previous description of Ta Mok, and suggests that non-KR audiences (including victims) are attracted to the site because of his role as a patriotic figure. An important question arises here. Why do KR and non-KR audiences celebrate Ta Mok as a patriot at the same time as supporting ECCC endeavours to reckon with the atrocities that are inextricably bound to his life? Is it possible that Ta Mok can be remembered as a 'butcher' and 'hero' to his acolytes and

---

<sup>32</sup> Personal interview, Anlong Veng, Cambodia, May 2009

adversaries? The reverence of a KR leader here persists despite the work of the ECCC, chiming even with victim audiences. It appears that the reframing of Ta Mok as a patriot, in this context, is presented on a different register to claims over his responsibility for the perpetration of atrocity.

The themes of reconciliation, patriotism and the integrity of national borders became increasingly pronounced in a series of conversations I had with a group of serving Royal Cambodian Armed Forces soldiers visiting Ta Mok's lakeside house. These conversations, in particular, perhaps help us understand the conflicted positioning of Ta Mok as 'hero' and 'villain'. A crucial contextual factor that coloured much of the fieldwork in Anlong Veng was a simmering border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia arising from the contested territorial ownership of the UNESCO-designated Preah Vihear temple World Heritage Site (located roughly 120km east of Anlong Veng). The dispute had stoked nationalist sentiments on either side of the border and a series of clashes between Cambodian and Thai forces near the temple in October 2008 and January and April 2009 had led to a number of casualties and several fatalities. As a consequence, the border with Thailand as a whole had become an increasingly sensitive, militarised space. As well as its proximity to the border itself, Anlong Veng was also located along one of the main routes to the disputed Preah Vihear temple. Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) troops on leave or breaking journeys to and from Preah Vihear were among the frequent visitors to Ta Mok's house. One soldier explained why they had chosen to visit:

This man was a patriot. He fought for Cambodia. Of course I want to see this place.<sup>33</sup>

The recognition of the site's historical significance stems again because Ta Mok is repositioned as a patriot. Another suggested that:

This is a historic site. It is an important place for Cambodia.

I: Why is it important? I read that before during the war the army was fighting this man.

That time is gone and his followers left him so now we are a country at peace.<sup>34</sup>

In the second instance, I wanted to ask about any potential conflict between loyalties to the 'state' (army) and reasons for visitation. It is telling that the soldier's response coincides with a state-sponsored understanding of reconciliation i.e. that in the absence of conflict the nation is at peace, and with the disintegration of the KR as a military force, there is no conflict around which to reconcile. It seems in this context Ta Mok can be recast through a new but resonant national lens. On a separate occasion, standing in front of a large map of Cambodia in Ta Mok's villa, another soldier remarked that:

---

<sup>33</sup> Personal interview, Anlong Veng, Cambodia, May 2009

<sup>34</sup> Personal interview, Anlong Veng, Cambodia, May 2009

He protected Cambodia. He was fighting the invaders. Just like now, we have problems again. The Thai people want to take Cambodian land. That is why we are going to the border.<sup>35</sup>

The direct parallel attempted here between the two ‘invading’ forces illuminates how the nation, its borders and its vulnerabilities is felt by remembering ‘national’ subjects: threat and obligation are foregrounded; memories of atrocity - that are the pivot of ongoing reconciliatory initiatives - are eschewed. The anxieties concerning national defence, the role of soldiers in maintaining the integrity of borders and the historical equivalence suggested here between Vietnamese occupation (fought by Ta Mok) and Thai incursions (fought by the current RCAF soldiers) not only allows for more sympathetic remembrances of KR figures like Ta Mok, but allows and obliges a ‘celebratory’ reframing of the past conflict. In terms of how we understand memory and its place within transitional justice, we must again be attentive to the range of influences that recast or oblige acts of memory, rather than treating the past as a stable archive for excavation or extraction. In this case, we could say that (highly dispersed) discourses of nation and nationalism coincide with memories that elevate and celebrate figures such as Ta Mok, specifically because his life can be recast as characterised by national sacrifice; his role in the commission and perpetration of atrocity is eschewed.

During my final visit to Ta Mok’s ‘historic house’ I attempted to invite some visiting RCAF soldiers to discuss issues of reconciliation and the ECCC more directly. As one soldier’s remarks indicate, the topics seemed almost inert:

Before Khmer fought Khmer. Now Cambodia is peaceful and it doesn’t matter what faction [you were on] before... Before, in the Pol Pot time, some people in my family died. But it is complicated politics. I know that people here [residents of Anlong Veng] think Ta Mok was right to fight and he defended Cambodia.<sup>36</sup>

It is notable again that the thorny history of Khmers in conflict with other Khmers is remembered as the central problematic characteristic of Cambodia’s experiences of war and genocide, i.e. as a crisis of national solidarity. Moreover, within this framework, peace is again equated with reconciliation, with the ‘erasure’ of those factions, or the closing of that ‘national’ rupture. As Dunnage suggests with reference to memories of ‘perpetrators’, ‘re-visitations of the past are inevitably conditioned by the imperative of national or group cohesion in the present’.<sup>37</sup> On the one hand, the soldier remembers both those ‘factionalisms’ and his personal experiences of loss. In this sense, we should not read his comments as downplaying the significance of the KR past. Yet on the other, the soldier acknowledges and is erudite toward the specific views of former KR cadre in Anlong Veng, without reflecting any explicit grievance. It seems, in this instance, that there does not appear to be a conflict between remembering the wrongs of the KR, and tolerance toward memories that celebrate their leaders.

---

<sup>35</sup> Personal interview, Anlong Veng, Cambodia, May 2009

<sup>36</sup> Personal interview, Anlong Veng, Cambodia, May 2009

<sup>37</sup> Dunnage, Jonathan. "Perpetrator memory and memories about perpetrators Editorial." *Memory Studies* 3, no. 2 (2010): 91-94.



Another soldier was keen to find out if I worked for the court. Despite my denials, he seemed eager to talk about the frequent suggestions made by the Cambodian government that ECCC prosecutions could provoke the resumption of conflict. He was convinced that this would not be the case because, he suggested, people were no longer ‘angry’. In the first instance, for supporters of the ECCC, this may vindicate objections to unrestricted prosecutions of KR figures. Yet, the soldier’s suggestion of a diminishing ‘anger’ is also striking: diminished ‘anger’ among perpetrators and their victims implies that memories of the KR, around which Cambodians are asked to reconcile, are weakening. On the one hand, this foregrounds the importance of recognising Cambodian communities’ resilience and establishment of relationships to memories of the KR outside of formal techniques or interventions like the ECCC. On the other, we must treat claims for diminishing anger cautiously because memory is always contextually maintained as an active rather than inevitable or automated process. On this point, it is important to remind ourselves of the investment of victim constituencies at the ECCC in relief of these encounters. Some victim groups need and expect contrition from the surviving KR leadership. Some victim groups also often assume the ECCC is able to deliver outcomes beyond its mandate, in particular, financial compensation or the ability to order capital punishment.<sup>38</sup> In this light, the place of perpetrator memories that seem, paradoxically, ‘unreconciled’ in the way they celebrate the KR leadership, and yet acquiescent to the principle of punishing those responsible for a period of terrible loss challenges our understanding of what reconciliation in Cambodia can and should look like. If the persistence of such perpetrator memories is dislocated from formal processes of reconciliation – neither necessarily challenging or in accordance with the ECCC – must they be transformed? Conversely, if they offend the needs of victim constituencies, can we see the persistence of such counter-memories as ‘reconciled’ within a public sphere where competing narratives about the past co-exist?

Several kilometres north of Anlong Veng town is the site of Ta Mok’s memorial stupa. In 2003 the MoT designated the site as ‘historically significant’ as part of the area heritage tourism strategy because it had hosted a large sawmill during the civil war (now marked ‘Ta Mok’s Saw Mill’ on blue MoT signage), the revenue from which was a key source of income for the KR insurgency. In July 2006, after Ta Mok’s death under detention in Phnom Penh, Ta Mok’s body was taken to the site at the behest of his daughter. Hundreds of local residents attended his funeral and the erection of a memorial stupa that month. At the time of fieldwork, work was nearing completion on the construction of a larger, more ornate memorial to replace the initial structure erected at the time of his death.

The Srah Chouk Pagoda was built in the years after the end of the war and relies on donations from local residents and the Khmer diaspora. The pagoda now also houses a community of monks who provide teaching and religious rites for the community. Given the KR’s past ideological commitment to the abolition

---

<sup>38</sup> For example, in October 2014, Victim Associations held protests against the “worthless” reparations proposed under Case 002/01. See, <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/victims-call-for-compensation-from-eccc-70135/>. Last accessed 29<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

of organised religion, I asked one monk about the relationship between former KR local residents and the pagoda:

People in this area were all KR. You know, some of them don't want to make merit<sup>39</sup> at all and people are very sensitive about talking about the Ta Mok history and taking part at the pagoda... this area is just developing in the last three or four years.<sup>40</sup>

The monk again points to frictions in what can and cannot be said in public in Anlong Veng about the past but subsumes those frictions under a reflection on economic progress. Reconciliation, as he envisaged it, seemed secondary to, or contingent upon, material development. I pressed this issue in relation to the remembrance of Ta Mok:

I: It has changed quickly. I first came to Anlong Veng in 2003 just after the war and it's very different. Should people remember Ta Mok by building places like this? This is the biggest stupa here, are there many others?

Soon there will be many stupas because people will start to understand. Some local people think the stupa [to Ta Mok] is good, some people say it is not relevant. Some people think he deserves this place [the stupa], and for the memory, that it is important to remember. But you know, many people just want to forget. They don't care.

I: Why don't they care anymore?

I'm not sure. It is not like people don't care, but it is just not so important now.

In the first instance, the monk's comments indicate the importance of pagodas to the normative ordering and anchoring of Cambodian public life.<sup>41</sup> While the monk's earlier remarks that former KR members were less inclined to engage in religious practice, his latter comment indicates an important but ambivalent link between the stupa and community remembrance of Ta Mok. To 'deserve' a stupa in accordance with Khmer Buddhist practice is to be revered as a public figure of great significance. At the same time, the monk's suggestion that people are eager to forget Ta Mok is located on a register of contemporary material and economic priorities. This again evidences the way that memories that valorise Ta Mok (and the KR leadership) are conflicted on multiple grounds. They persistently appear to disrupt the state-sponsored and ECCC denunciations of the KR leaders but also routinely foreground the importance of material and economic progress ahead of any duty to remember. After several encounters with former KR that celebrated Ta Mok's memory on the basis of the infrastructure he had built for the community, the monk's suggestion

---

<sup>39</sup> Making merit refers to Buddhist and animistic ceremonies that are intended to be spiritually enriching but also ward off inauspicious spiritual forces. As one monk explained to me, they are often treated as 'good luck' rituals.

<sup>40</sup> Personal interview, Anlong Veng, Cambodia, April 2009

<sup>41</sup> Kent, Alexandra. "Purchasing power and pagodas: The Sīma monastic boundary and consumer politics in Cambodia." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38:2 (2007): 335-354.

that he would be forgotten in the wake of material and economic progress highlighted how wider contexts reframe memory in contradictory ways. The monk's comments chime with wider fieldwork encounters in Anlong Veng. Former KR were more eager to talk about jobs and income as material priorities ahead of any political opposition to the Cambodian state, or ECCC. As one former cadre asked, "People have to think about their standard of living, and after three decades of war, why would we think about the ECCC?"<sup>42</sup> In this sense, it is a wider set of economic forces conditioning processes of reconciliation, as such, rather than principally juridical or symbolic interventions. More broadly, given the investment of the former KR in Anlong Veng in the material development of the area, these conversations seem at odds with the Cambodian government's claim that further prosecutions at the ECCC could reactivate latent political divisions.

Outside the grounds of the Srah Chouk Pagoda, one of Ta Mok's daughters runs a small shop. A large portrait of her father hangs on the back wall, depicting him in his younger years. As noted, at the time of fieldwork Ta Mok's stupa was undergoing reconstruction. I was keen to ascertain how and why a more ornate memorial was being erected:

I: I was told there was a memorial here previously. Why did they rebuild the memorial for Ta Mok?

It's the kindness and generosity of his children toward the family, and because he is one of the heroes. Not only his children, our neighbours, and friends too. He was the owner of the land, the waters. We built the previous one just temporarily, this is the permanent one.<sup>43</sup>

The upkeep and erection of stupas in Cambodia tends to rely on family and community donations, particularly in the case of community or religious leaders that are deemed worthy of exceptional reverence. In this instance, Ta Mok's daughter locates this through an understanding of her father as 'heroic', but also employs a specific phrase – 'the owner of the land, the waters' – that conveys a spiritual and paternalist quality to both his life and the obligation to remember; reverence, here, is expressed through a sacralisation of his memory. The consecration of Ta Mok's memory is another example of the way his life is re-remembered under new and shifting (religious) frameworks.

The presence of a well-established memorial to Ta Mok, in comparison to Pol Pot's cremation site, was a key point of interest for understanding local memory frictions and their implications for reconciliation. Given her direct connection to the KR leadership, I was keen to explore this with Ta Mok's daughter:

I: Why does Ta Mok have this memorial but Pol Pot doesn't have one?

Pol Pot ran the whole country. But for Ta Mok he was responsible for this area only, but only last... He built the infrastructure. He built the roads, the foundations for how they are now, they are still used. He

---

<sup>42</sup> Personal interview, Anlong Veng, Cambodia, April 2009

<sup>43</sup> Personal interview, Anlong Veng, Cambodia, May 2009

built many schools and the hospital, and the bridge too. People know this. They know it was him that he gave the services.

I: And do people still talk about the time when Ta Mok was in charge?

I don't know. He was the father to all people in this area. Even his children, he didn't give much money to us. The money went to services for everyone. He looked after everyone in the area. He gave people land and money to poor people. Everyone must have something, he believed... I am his daughter; of course I am proud of him. He was a hero of the KR. Everyone had enough to eat. The irrigation system meant that there was plenty of fish, so much fish. If I say he is a hero, of course I would think that. To understand Ta Mok you need to ask other people in Anlong Veng.

I: What about the other leaders? Khieu Samphan, Nuon Chea? The ones on trial.

I don't really know about them... [Continued below]

These comments are illuminating for several reasons. In the first instance, the marginalisation of memories of Pol Pot (and other KR leaders) could be read to follow from the factional infighting that characterised the final days of the KR insurgency. Pol Pot's internal purges of Son Sen and his family in 1997 led to his public denunciation by other senior KR figures, including Ta Mok. Moreover, other senior members of the KR leadership like Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea (both currently held on charges at the ECCC) had surrendered by 1998. In this sense, the maintenance of memories that celebrate Ta Mok seem to hinge upon his role as the last champion of the KR cause: he was, so to speak, the 'last man standing'. On the one hand, we could read this as memory that conflicts with the ECCC because it seems to illuminate a resistant "victors" narrative within the wider context of a defeated insurgency. On the other, it is striking that Ta Mok's daughter specifically suggests his contributions to Anlong Veng as obliging his remembrance. The way that the physical 'artefacts' of Ta Mok's life are pointed to as memory 'cues' – schools, a hospital, bridges, the irrigation system – seems to again show how the reproduction of celebratory accounts of Ta Mok are coloured by nostalgia rather than any notion that former KR subscribe to accounts of the past that could lead to a resumption of conflict. This also shows that functional 'artefacts' (infrastructure such as schools or hospitals) of the past – 'place memory' according to Connerton – shape remembering as much as specific sites of memory, such as museums and memorials.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Ta Mok's daughter seemed to acknowledge (self-reflexively) her reasoning for cherishing his memory: how could she not be proud of her father? In this sense, we must further reconsider the way memories that laud the KR leadership can be thought to disrupt reconciliation as such. In this instance, the celebration of Ta Mok is rooted in a familial relationship, rather than his role within a history of political violence over which the ECCC adjudicates. Again, though, we are invited to rethink the relationship of such memories to the varying expectations and needs of victim constituencies elsewhere in Cambodia.

---

<sup>44</sup> Connerton, Paul. *How modernity forgets*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

The contrast between a tendency toward hagiography and the more ‘everyday’ priorities of memory was captured in one of Ta Mok’s daughter’s final remarks:

[Continued from above]...People in this area believe he [Ta Mok] possessed a spiritual power. When they brought his body here [from custody in Phnom Penh]. It rained, such strong rain, all day it rained. And the people felt very cold.

I: What lessons are there to learn from your father’s life?

People here just want peace now. They want their children to feel peace and be secure, to make money and earn a living.

Again, Ta Mok’s daughter sacralises Ta Mok’s memory (as embodying a spiritual power) – in this instance, on animistic rather than Buddhist terms – and juxtaposes this representation with the ‘lessons’ of his life: that people simply want peace and prosperity. The apparent contradiction between the lionisation of ‘the butcher’ and the suggestion that people ‘just’ want peace seems to capture the peculiar, ambivalent states of memory that exist in Anlong Veng.

## Conclusions

Perpetrator memories and memories of perpetrators in Anlong Veng are vexed. They are rooted in the local history of Anlong Veng, but also respond to national exhortations to remember in the way they implicate far wider histories of political violence. They pose conflicts with the national biography but seem internally and locally contradictory in their own right. There are memories that appear, on the surface, at odds with the denunciation of the KR leadership at the ECCC. These should, in many senses, challenge the possibility of reconciling parties to a consensual reading of past violence, and the resonance of the ECCC as it attempts to stabilise a public narrative of the KR years as a foundation for reconciliation. This article, however, has tried to show in the stories and encounters retold here that the implications of perpetrator memories for reconciliation are themselves often conflicted, illustrating the limits, traction and dissonances that characterise the intersection of state-sanctioned and locally embedded claims over memory.

Memories of perpetrators exist in multiply conflicted ways. The hagiographic memories of Ta Mok stand in ambivalent relation to the state-sanctioned and ECCC reading of past political violence. They are not ‘reconciled’ but coincided frequently with acquiescence to the need for prosecutions of the KR leadership. The celebration of Ta Mok as a patriot, even among several non-KR informants, further indicates the power of contemporary nationalist tropes of patriotism, vulnerability and solidarity in subsuming memories of his role in the perpetration of atrocity. Furthermore, Ta Mok’s memory tended to be lauded by former KR on registers dislocated from the judicial denunciation of the KR at the ECCC. They pointed to his local

contribution to the area – the schools, hospitals, and roads he built – over any memories that glorified the cause or ideals of the KR. Against this, the former KR of Anlong Veng located such reflections as diminishing in relevance against the material priorities of their everyday lives. Memories of perpetrators can be both amplified and muted inconsistently to formal reconciliatory endeavours. Importantly, this further elides claims by the Cambodian government that prosecutions could jeopardise peace and stability because of latent fissures in Cambodian society, or lingering KR grievances.

What place do perpetrator memories and memories of perpetrators have in post-atrocity spaces? I would suggest that there are no easy answers to be gleaned from this case, where ‘unreconciled’ memories seem to persist alongside and often, contrarily, acquiescent toward a mechanism intended to denounce them (and yet insensitive to the varied needs of wider communities of victims). Reconciliation, as a set of ideas and practices, may always be troubled by the conflicting ‘meta’ aims of transitional justice: repairing social fabrics requires denouncing what ruptured them and the contrition of perpetrators; the liberal goals of peace and reconciliation foreground the importance of free speech and a public sphere in which competing narratives of the past coexist. The purpose of this article is not to arbitrate the appropriate point at which perpetrator memories should be curtailed, or to advocate for their recognition. Rather, the article has shown how locally embedded perpetrator memories can converge with, disrupt and elude the formal politics of ‘national reconciliation’ emanating from the ECCC.